

Message Text

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ORIGIN PA-02

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-11 ISO-00 SCS-06 CA-01 L-03
H-01 HA-05 /042 R

DRAFTED BY PA/PRESS:MABADER:CB
APPROVED BY PA/PRESS:JHTRATTNER
NEA:WCRAWFORD
SCS/N:PELLETREAU

-----059061 280003Z /63

O R 272243Z JUN 78
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY JIDDA IMMEDIATE
INFO USLO RIYADH
AMCONSUL DHAHRAN
AMEMBASSY PARIS

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E.O. 11652:N/A

TAGS:SOPN

SUBJECT: PRESS QUERIES ON AMCITS HELD IN SAUDI ARABIA
REF: STATE 163824

1. ON 6/21, DEPARTMENT WAS CALLED BY WASHINGTON-BASED INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE REPORTER FRED FERRIS AND ASKED TO PROVIDE DETAILED INFORMATION ON AMERICANS EITHER HELD IN SAUDI JAILS OR NOT PERMITTED TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY. INQUIRY APPARENTLY MADE AT BEHEST OF TRIBUNE'S PARIS BUREAU WHICH, ACCORDING TO FERRIS, HAD REPORT THAT DEPARTMENT RECENTLY ASSIGNED ARABIST TO "TRAVEL AROUND THE COUNTRY TO DEAL WITH EMIRS" IN SECURING RELEASE OF AMCITS HELD IN "LOCAL DUNGEONS." INTEREST IN MATTER UNDOUBTEDLY HEIGHTENED BY RECENT WIDELY-PUBLICIZED ACCOUNTS OF SAUDI FLOGGING OF TWO UK CITS.

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2. DEPARTMENT NOTED THAT AS OF JUNE 21 12 AMCITS WERE PRESENTLY IN JAIL; THREE OF THESE HAD BEEN SENTENCED. WE PROVIDED NATURE OF CHARGES AGAINST ALL 12; ON THREE INDIVIDUALS SENTENCED, GAVE LENGTHS/DATES OF TERMS. ALSO NOTED THAT 15 AMCITS COULD NOT PRESENTLY LEAVE THE COUNTRY. FERRIS ALSO WANTED TO KNOW THE TOTAL NUMBER OF AMCITS

ARRESTED, JAILED AND SENTENCED SINCE BEGINNING OF THIS YEAR. DEPT WILL PROVIDE THIS INFO SHORTLY.

3. FERRIS ASKED IF WE KNEW OF INSTANCE IN WHICH ANY AMER-

ICAN HAD BEEN FLOGGED. DEPARTMENT INDICATED WE KNEW OF ONLY ONE SUCH INSTANCE. (SEE JIDDA 6495 OF 9/22/77). WILL BRIEF HIM ON DETAILS, PROVIDING YOU CONCUR WITH GUIDANCE IN SEPTEL. WE STRESSED THAT FLOGGING WAS FORM OF PUNISHMENT MEANT TO DISGRACE RATHER THAN CAUSE PHYSICAL PAIN. ALSO NOTED THAT WHILE FLOGGING MIGHT BE WRITTEN INTO PUNISHMENT FOR CERTAIN CRIMES, SAUDIS INFREQUENTLY CARRIED THIS OUT IN CASES INVOLVING FOREIGN NATIONALS.

ON THE POINT OF ARABIST BEING DISPATCHED TO THE COUNTRY, WE STATED THAT ROBERT CHASE, AN AREA SPECIALIST, HAD BEEN ASSIGNED TO JIDDA AS CONSUL GENERAL IN DECEMBER 1977 BUT THAT THE REST OF THE TRIBUNE'S REPORT WAS GROSSLY MISCAST. WE EXPLAINED THAT IT WAS OFTEN NECESSARY FOR PERSON IN CHASE'S CAPACITY TO HAVE LANGUAGE FACILITY IN ORDER TO COMMUNICATE WITH LOCAL OFFICIALS WHO FREQUENTLY DID NOT SPEAK ENGLISH. FURTHER, WE ALSO NOTED THAT CHASE OFTEN HAD TO EXPLAIN SAUDI CUSTOMS TO AMERICANS IN AREA, AND WITH HIS EXPERTISE, WAS FULLY ABLE TO DO THIS. WE CLARIFIED THAT IT WAS PART OF A CONSULAR OFFICER'S JOB TO REGULARLY VISIT JAILED AMCITS AND THAT IN MEETING THIS RESPONSIBILITY, IT OFTEN MEANT THE OFFICER WOULD HAVE TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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VISIT FACILITIES SCATTERED THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. ADDITIONALLY, WE REFUTED NOTION THAT SAUDI JAILS WERE DUNGEONS.

FERRIS THEN ASKED IF WE HAD A BILATERAL CONSULAR AGREEMENT WITH THE SAUDIS. WE EXPLAINED THAT WE DID NOT HAVE A FULL FLEDGED CONSULAR CONVENTION BUT THAT WE HAD BEEN DISCUSSING THIS WITH THE SAUDIS FOR THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS THAT WE EXPECTED IN THE NOT TOO DISTANT FUTURE TO PRESENT THEM WITH A DRAFT CONVENTION, AND THAT WE HOPED TO RAPIDLY REACH A FINAL AGREEMENT. SUCH AN AGREEMENT WOULD SERVE TO REGULARIZE THE CONSULAR PROCESS. IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS, WE CONCEDED THAT WE ARE NOT ALWAYS NOTIFIED WHEN AN AMCIT IS ARRESTED NOR DO WE ALWAYS GET ACCESS TO THEM AS QUICKLY AS WE WOULD PREFER.

AS A MATTER OF GENERAL BACKGROUND, THE FOLLOWING POINTS WERE ALSO STRESSED (1) PRESENTLY, THERE IS A LARGE US PRESENCE IN SAUDI ARABIA (33,000) AND ONLY A VERY SMALL PERCENTAGE OF THIS GROUP HAS BEEN ARRESTED OR DETAINED. (2) THE SAUDIS DO NOT ARBITARILY ARREST FOREIGN CITIZENS. IN MOST EVERY ARREST CASE INVOLVING AMERICANS, THERE WAS REASON FOR SAG TO BELIEVE THAT THE INDIVIDUALS HAD COMMITTED SOME INFRACTION OF SAUDI LAW. (3) IT IS NOT AN UNUSUAL

PROCEDURE TO REFUSE PERSONS ACCUSED OF VIOLATING A COUNTRY'S LAWS THE RIGHT TO LEAVE THAT COUNTRY UNTIL THE INVESTIGATION IS COMPLETED. A SIMILAR PROCEDURE IS IN FACT OFTEN EMPLOYED IN USA.

ON 6/26, THE DEPARTMENT RECEIVED ADDITIONAL INQUIRY ON FLOGGINGS OF USCITS FROM NATIONAL ENQUIRER REPORTER ROD GIBSON. WE RESPONDED ALONG SIMILAR LINES.

FOR PARIS: SHOULD ARTICLE APPEAR IN HERALD TRIBUNE, PLEASE CABLE TEXT TO DEPARTMENT AND OUR POSTS IN SAUDI ARABIA. VANCE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CITIZEN PROTECTION, THE PRESS, PRISONERS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 27 jun 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978STATE163823
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: MABADER:CB
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780266-0993
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780614/aaaaamhw.tel
Line Count: 126
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: ce67e57e-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN PA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 STATE 163824
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2188051
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRESS QUERIES ON AMCITS HELD IN SAUDI ARABIA
TAGS: SOPN, SA, US
To: JIDDA
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/ce67e57e-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014